



Transit for Livable Communities  
626 Selby Avenue  
Saint Paul, MN 55104  
651-767-0298  
tlc@tlcminnesota.org  
www.tlcminnesota.org

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## Statement by Transit for Livable Communities about investment choices for transportation stimulus spending in the metropolitan area.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide public comment. While the Transportation Advisory Board is the primary decision-maker, that body has not provided an opportunity for public input.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act or “stimulus” provided slightly more than \$300 million to the metro region for transportation projects. While the majority of that money has been erroneously characterized across the country as “highway” money, the funding can be used for nearly any transportation capital project by any agency. None of it requires a local match and it shouldn’t.

We strongly believe that the region’s guiding principal for federal stimulus dollars should be “fix it first” to advance safety and job creation outcomes. Rather than building three more miles of new Trunk Highway 610 and expanding the interchange at TH-169/I-494, we should be repairing the roads, bike routes, and sidewalks we already have.

Anyone who drives, walks, or bicycles knows of the sorry state of our region’s transportation infrastructure. Mn/DOT’s new Draft Statewide Transportation Plan admits that the percentage of pavements in poor condition (which lead to safety problems) is expected to double between 2007 and 2012 (Plan page 7.2-5). Just last week Mn/DOT reported that expected state transportation revenues (gas tax, tab fees and sales tax on car purchases) have declined substantially. Leading staff to note the potential delay of several planned repair projects including the reconstruction of the Lafayette Bridge in St. Paul which Mn/DOT rates as “fracture critical, structurally deficient and in poor condition.”

Our regional highway system already far exceeds peer regions on a lane mile per capita basis. Region-wide congestion is down over the past five years, paralleling a national trend in reduced travel which preceded the steady hikes in gas prices, and the downturn in the economy.

While we appreciate the urgency of selecting priority projects to move forward, more information should be provided to TAB members, the media and the public, about the long list of Mn/DOT and city and county repair projects that will have to wait if two highway expansion projects are selected. Those other projects includes everything from a mill and overlay on Highway 52, street repair in Golden Valley, a pedestrian bridge in Minnetonka Beach, and traffic safety improvements near a school in Mendota Heights.

We also believe that the region should spend more than the minimum required on transit and pedestrian and bicycle projects including Americans with Disabilities (ADA) accessibility. People in this region want more and safer options for getting around. Given that the Metropolitan Council TPP reports that our regional bus system has shrunk 10% since 2002, and a major transit operating deficit looms, we should prioritize stimulus funding to address the backlog of transit, sidewalk, and bicycle projects.

The first priority for stimulus funding is creating as many new jobs as soon as possible. Maintenance and transit projects create more jobs faster. Almost all preservation and short term resurfacing can be completed in a season, and the list of “shovel ready” transit projects far exceeds the current stimulus funding. They are also more labor intensive than other projects. (see handout).

This region needs to think longer-term about its' future. Our primary transportation focus over the last two decades has been highway expansion. Our new focus needs to be repair and new travel options. Big highway projects are not a strategic investment for a more energy-efficient regional economy. They won't inspire today's college graduates to begin their careers here, they won't entice retirees to stay here, and they are not what make a region a hot destination for employers. We should prioritize stimulus funding to jump-start the economy by fixing what we have and providing the new transportation options Minnesotan's want.